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HAMILTON COLLEGE

HALF-CENTURY ANNALS

By W. H. H. MILLER

Of the Class of 1861



READ AT THE ALUMNI MEETING AT HAMILTON
COLLEGE, CLINTON, NEW YORK, JUNE 28, 1911

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Members of Class of 1861

JOHN N. BEACH

*HORACE P. BIGELOW

*PORTER C. BLISS

THOMAS W. CHEESBROUGH

*ALBERT L. CHILDS

*CHARLES M. DAVIS

*JOSEPH H. DURKEE

JAMES S. GREVES

*JOHN C. HIGBEE

*HARRISON HOYT

*JOHN D. JONES

DAVID L. KIEHLE

JOHN F. MCNAIR

WILLIAM H. H. MILLER

*WILLIAM W. NEWELL

*GEORGE J. NORTH

JOHN G. OSBORN

*CHARLES H. ROYS

GEORGE H. STARR

*FRANCIS A. TORREY

GEORGE W. WARNER

WILLIAM W. WETMORE

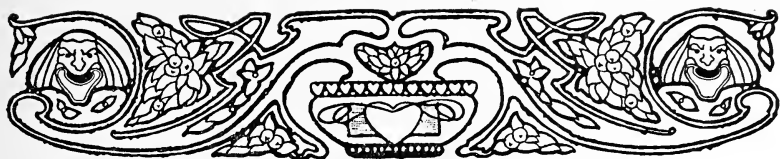
*ISAAC N. WILCOXEN

*FRANK B. WILLARD

ABEL S. WOOD

AARON M. WOODHULL

* Deceased



Gentlemen of the Alumni:

The annals of a half a century in less than a half an hour!

And such a half century! A half century of invention, discovery, and growth in wealth, in population and of material progress, such as all the centuries before do not parallel.

It is evident that I can not be a half century analyst in this broad sense. My subject must be narrowed to the College and to the Class of which I was a member, and even as to that I can barely touch the subject.

The Class of 1861 began its life on the first Thursday of September, 1857. At that time Hamilton College had the Chapel, three dormitories, North, Middle and South, the Observatory, a poorly equipped laboratory, a worse equipped gymnasium, a small building for specimens pertaining to various "ologies," and last but by no means least, especially of a hot summer evening,

"The old oaken bucket, the iron-bound bucket,
The moss-covered bucket, that hung in the well."

What the College has now in multiplied buildings, equipment and facilities in every way you can all see.

The beginning of our class life was almost coincident with the beginning of the greatest financial panic which up to that time had occurred in this country.

This latter fact was of no particular significance except that it made everything cheap, our board running from two dollars to three dollars and a half per week, and those who paid the latter price were thought to be tempting bankruptcy. Nor was the board at the cheaper price like that at the Vermont Academy, where the boys, in Yankee phrase, said, "Board could be had for e'en a'most nothin' and e'en a'most nothin' for board."

Our class life ended on the 18th day of July, 1861, three days before the first battle of Bull Run, near the beginning of the greatest civil war recorded in history.

The total membership of the class was, I think, twenty-six, of whom twenty-two graduated; and the names and faces and forms of all are nearly as familiar to me now, after the lapse of fifty years, as the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, although many of them I have never seen since graduation or about that time.

My belief is that of the twenty-six the present survivors are eight or nine. Of the twenty-six I

think over half became soldiers in the army of the union. As I remember them, the members of the class were bright, manly, likeable fellows, good students, alert in such college sports as we had in those days, when athletics were no part of college life. It was during our four years that the present so-called "National game" was born, the students before that, however, playing the old-fashioned town ball among themselves; and up to that time I think no game of foot ball, basket ball, running races or any of the modern athletics, except in the primitive gymnasium, were practiced on the Hill. There were then no glee clubs, banjo clubs, or any other clubs among the students. Nor was it only in athletics proper and club accomplishments that our instruction was deficient. Some twenty years ago an old political friend and associate, who had a pool table in his house, and your annalist attempted to play that game against two sons of Hamilton of the Class of 1890. After several trials with uniform results, my associate, putting up his cue, said, "Miller, when you were at Hamilton and I was at Dartmouth, we didn't have any professorships of pool."

In our time a large proportion of the students boarded in the village or at some other remote points, carrying their noon lunches in baskets; and such as did not get sufficient exercise in this way

walked to and from the post office in the village in the evening to deposit and receive their mail.

We had, then, six Greek-Letter Fraternities, five secret and one anti-secret, but no fraternity houses, unless possibly the old Sigma Phi house in the village was completed during our last year.

It was during our time that the two old literary and debating societies, the Phœnix and the Union, theretofore very great forces for good in the college life, were destroyed, as the result of a conflict to control their offices and honors by a combine among the fraternities. This was my first experience with a "combine," and unfortunately there was no Sherman anti-trust or monopoly statute, reasonable or unreasonable, to be invoked, although we did go to Utica and consult Mr. Francis Kernan and Mr. Roscoe Conkling with a view to a possible legal remedy. However, on Wednesday before Commencement in 1860 was the last effort to hold exercises by either of those societies, the result of such effort being a conflict which anywhere, except in a college, would have been deemed a noisy and disreputable row, almost a riot in the college chapel. Since that time I have seen and had to do with many combines; but none has been more injurious and destructive in a small way than that which annihilated these two old societies.

From 1857 to 1861 was an epoch-making period, a period of great events. These I speak of not as

peculiarly affecting our class except that they gave us great things to think about, and because they furnished topics of discussion of absorbing interest, whenever two or three students were gathered together, as well as subjects for rhetorical pyrotechnics on the chapel stage.

The achievement of the emancipation of Italy by Garibaldi, the struggle between freedom and slavery in the territories, the great debates of 1858 between Lincoln and Douglas, the raid on Harper's Ferry by John Brown, his arrest, trial and execution, the presidential campaign of 1860, during which the southern horizon was made lurid by constant flashes of lightning in threats of secession, of the destruction of the Union, and of civil war, certainly furnished matter more provocative of serious thought than the ordinary happenings in piping times of peace.

The result was that we were all in our small way politicians or at least interested in public affairs. I recall a remark of a member of the class, Charles M. Davis, whose death, within a few years after graduation, cut off what promised to be a bright career in journalism, which illustrates my idea. He was, I may say, older than his years and in all his speech most proper, and careful never to use a vulgar or profane word. His home was in Cayuga County, and he was a very ardent admirer of Senator Seward, whose home was at Auburn. One

evening in the Fall of 1860, as we were walking up from the village, talking of the outlook, the probabilities and possibilities, he turned to me and with unusual earnestness said: "I can see no light ahead. There is slavery, a d—d, great big black fact, standing a solid wall before us, and I can see no way of getting over or around it. What possible outcome can there be?" The wise men of the Nation were utterly at sea and hopelessly divided on this question, and, of course, I, a boy of twenty years, had no answer. The idea that this solid wall would be swept away in a four years' deluge of blood was unthought of; it was at that time unthinkable.

Another feature of the times tending to high thought was the fact that we were living in the golden age of American literature. Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, Emerson, Hawthorne, Holmes and many others of like eminence were enlightening the world with thoughts and with contributions to the magazines and libraries worth reading, rereading and remembering. Across the water, also, Anglo-Saxon literature that survives, and will survive, was being made by Macauley, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, and others whose names are household words, and by a poet laureate who not only filled his place but expanded its mold far beyond the stature of any British poet of this generation.

Nor is this all. At that time men were valued for what they *were* rather than for what they *had*. Neither in speech nor in public print, nor, as I believe, even in thought, was it then questioned that Demosthenes and Pitt were greater men, men more worthy of emulation, than Croesus and Rothschild. Nor had the Golden Rule as yet been supplanted by the rule of gold; nor was any one then bold enough to say that the ten commandments, especially the eighth, were obsolete or "archaic."

And the faculty of the college did not fail to impress us on all proper occasions with high ideals. They were all men whose lives illustrated their professions, and they were not only our instructors, but our personal friends, and as such followed us in after life; and, judging by my own experience, took the trouble to commend us whenever they saw, or thought they saw, anything done by us worthy of commendation. Speaking for myself, and I think I might also speak for the other members of the class, living and dead, I aver that the thought of how my actions might impress them was always a potent force in shaping my life. Fisher and Avery and Root and Peters and Curtis and North and Upson and Evans, on behalf of the class of '61 I salute your memory, and thank you for all you did by word and deed to show us whatsoever things were worthy and of good report, and what things we ought to cherish and cultivate to

make character like yours, respected and worthy of respect.

Not one of these men *had* much, according to the ratings of Dun and Bradstreet, but every one of them *was*, and I believe still *is*, much in the economy of the universe.

In what has been said there has been no intention to claim that our class was remarkable or exceptional. We were pretty much like the other half-dozen classes with which we were brought in contact during our four years' term. We had the usual number of class contests with sophomores and freshmen. Doubtless some members of the class could explain how the tongue of the chapel bell sometimes became paralyzed, or how the locks on recitation room doors sometimes became unmanageable, and how, when we needed a new plank sidewalk and the task of building it was put upon the students, it was settled, in the real trades-union spirit, that there should never be work over time or too rapid, lest we should not get a sufficient number of half-holidays.

Nor since graduation has our record been remarkable. No one of the class, so far as I know, was ever in jail or in Congress; and, as Artemus Ward said, "Our other habits have been tolerably good."

And now, what shall I say of the members of the class individually. Of course, you have not the desire or patience to listen to much of this sort.

Bigelow, the wit, the speaker, the mathematician of the class, being once called on by "Old Greek" for a definition of a spondee, pointed to the No. ten boots of his next neighbor, Bliss, on the front seat, and the answer was accepted as satisfactory amid great hilarity.

But this next neighbor, Bliss, was also something of a genius, and the first man in the class to win public notice, and to find his name in the encyclopedias. He was the son of a missionary among the Indians of the Northwest. At the time of a hostile outbreak, when all the missionary's family were obliged to flee for their lives, our classmate said the hostiles pursued him a day and a night, when they concluded, "The world could never give the Bliss for which they sighed."

Of Joe Durkee, who carried an empty sleeve ever after the battle of Chancellorsville, and who, as a railroad man and banker, became one of the leading and substantial men of Florida;

Of Harry Hoyt, who for many years was a forceful and successful lawyer at Syracuse;

Of Greves, our Clark Prize man, who has been active in his loyalty to the old College for fifty years, because he was so made that he can not fail to be loyal to any good cause;

Of Kiehle, who has conferred honor on the College and on himself, in connection with the Uni-

versity of Minnesota, and as Superintendent of Public Instruction in that State, and who is now, in the twilight of life, still at work as a Christian minister on the far northwest coast;

Of North, our valedictorian, who, after an honorable army career, and just when he was getting well started in the law at Des Moines, was cut off by death within ten years after graduation;

Of Roys, a good soldier, a good lawyer, a good citizen, who was driven to his death by the oncoming cloud of what he believed to be hereditary insanity, whose shadow he saw darkening all his future;

Of Starr, a prisoner captured fighting manfully at Gettysburg and who after an escape from a southern prison and recapture, finally did get away over the mountains of the Carolinas into the Union lines in East Tennessee, and has ever since been handicapped by the disabilities resulting from the hardships so endured;

Of Frank Willard, who, I venture to say, was the dearest and most lovable man in the class and the first to give up his life for his country, in the early Fall of 1861, as a soldier in the regiment of Colonel (afterward President) Garfield;

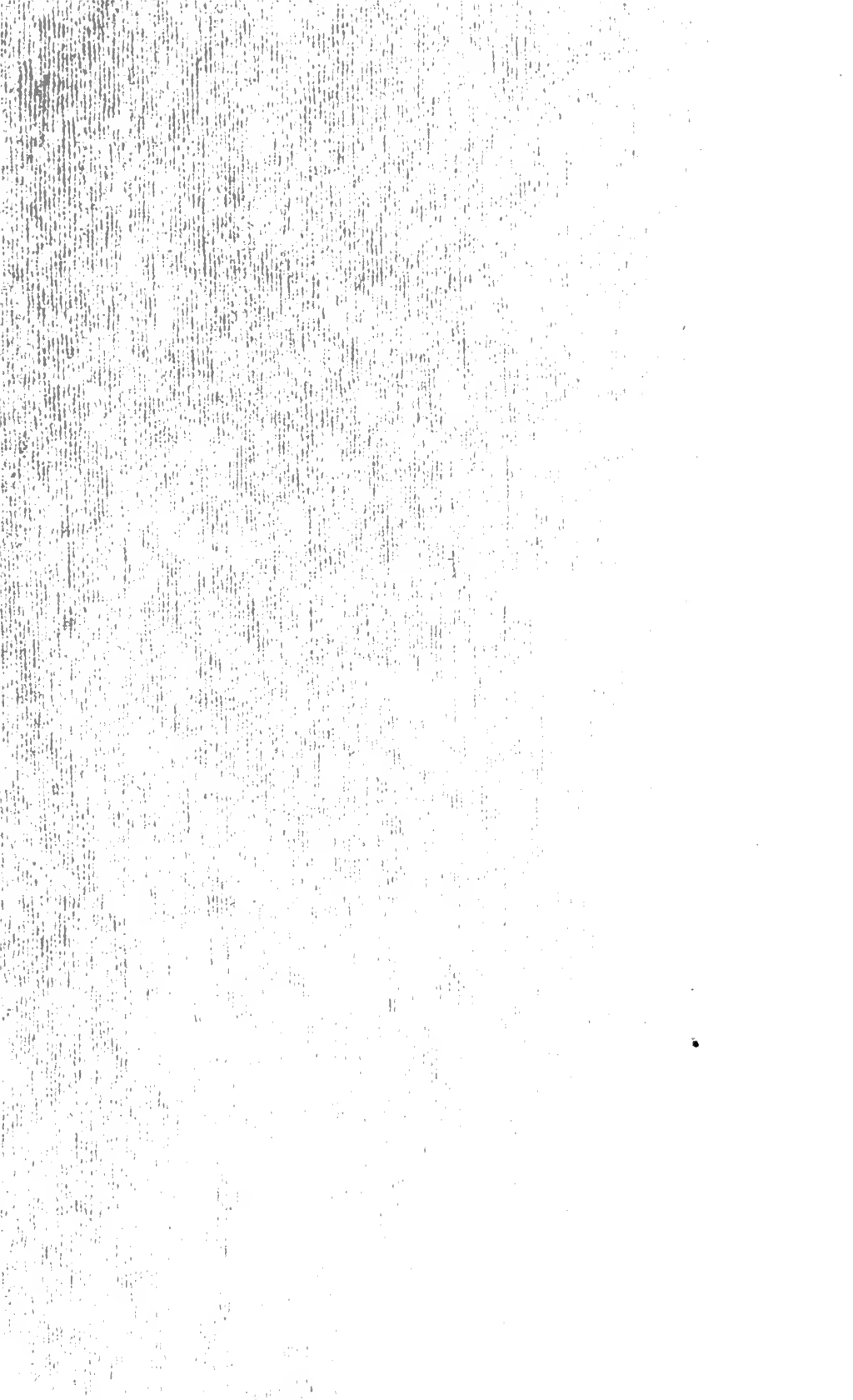
Of these and others not less deserving, I have not time to speak at length. Time, propriety and your patience forbid that I go on.

With one incident of which your annalist was the hero or the victim, as you please, and which I am sure I may repeat without egotism, which incident as Ian McClaren would say, was at the time "much tasted" by my classmates, I will cease from troubling and the weary will be at rest.

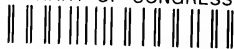
We were reciting in French. Prof. North was very patiently trying to get me to pronounce the French O. After repeated efforts with no satisfactory results, in that gentle, quiet voice which was so forceful, he said: "I am afraid, Mr. Miller, the aperture is a little too large." I am sorry to say that whenever I have attempted French pronunciation since that time, the result has been much the same.

And now, rejoicing that Hamilton College is still a college, and does not aspire to be anything else, that the good old mother stands by the old landmarks and gives to her boys a course of all-around culture rather than a smattering of many selected specialties, and hoping that this course will continue without variableness or shadow of turning, I say to my classmates, present and absent, to all who have been kind enough to listen to me, and to the dear old Alma Mater, Hail and Farewell.





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